

AccessLetter

**Cambridge Commission for
Persons with Disabilities**

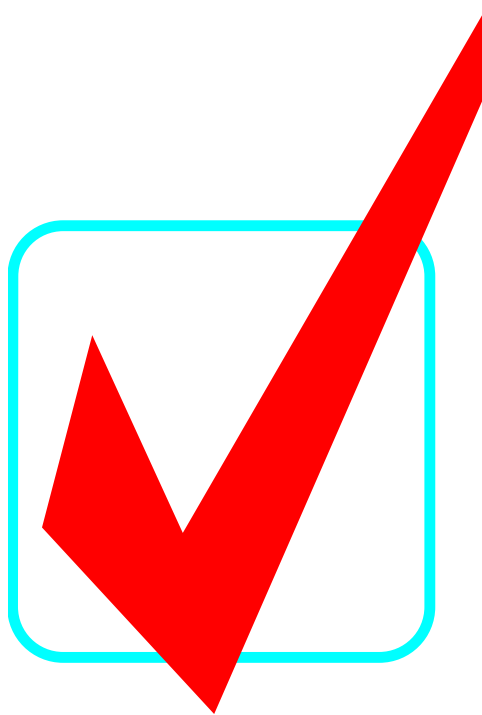
Congress passes voting access bill

Just weeks before the November elections, the U.S. Congress passed a bill to modernize the nation's voting procedures, and sent it to the desk of President Bush, who is expected to sign it. Entitled the "Help America Vote Act," the bill authorizes up to \$3.9 Billion over the next three years to be distributed among the 50 states in order to improve elections systems, including making polling places more accessible to voters with disabilities.

This legislation, which will establish more uniform voting standards and polling procedures nationwide, was first conceived in the wake of widespread voting irregularities during the 2000 presidential elections, particularly the Florida debacle, which featured butterfly ballots, hanging chads, and large numbers of disenfranchised voters.

Some of these funds available under this bill would be earmarked to purchase accessible voting machines that could be used independently by blind voters. An example of such a device, a touch-screen voting machine with speech output to headphones, was demonstrated recently to commissioners and staff of the Cambridge Election Commission (see "Election Commission Eyes Accessible Voting Machines," AccessLetter August/September 2002).

Local reaction to the bill's passage was generally positive, with some caution. Kenneth Bowles, a member of Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities who is blind, applauded the legislation: "I look forward to being able to finally vote in complete privacy wherein my electoral choices have neither to be shared with a helpful friend or an equally helpful yet subtly resented stranger to whom I am compelled to reveal my political stripes."



ACCESS THE VOTE!

Rusty Drugan, a commissioner with the Cambridge Election Commission remarked, "The legislation has great promise for reaching the goal of insuring that persons with disabilities have the equal access for voting that a democracy must require and provide." Mr. Drugan looks forward to future elections, "when the voting apparatus is the same for all voters, with or without disabilities, so that the voting experience is both uniform and accessible for everyone."

But Mr. Drugan expressed concern that, while authorizing a large sum of money for election reform,

Congress has yet to appropriate any funds: "It's a landmark bill and a great advancement for civil rights -- but the measure of true commitment and serious intent will be shown only when an appropriations bill is passed." No changes are expected to be implemented in time for this November's elections.

"Beyond a Ticket to Work" event a success

A diverse group of experts on federal social security programs for people with disabilities analyzed the latest batch of federal work incentives in a panel discussion entitled "Beyond a Ticket to Work," at CCPD's annual employment event on October 9th. The panel presentation explored both the significant benefits and many limitations of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, or TWWIIA. The federal Social Security Administration (SSA) is phasing in TWWIIA's features over the next few years.

According to a National Organization on Disability/Harris poll taken in 2000, fully 56% of people with disabilities are working, up from 46% in 1986. But the percentage of people who say they are unable to work has risen steadily over the past 14 years, from 29% to 43%. Furthermore, an employment gap still exists between people with and without disabilities: while over 80% of nondisabled adults have jobs, only 56% of adults with disabilities who say they are able to work actually have a job.

Michael Muehe, Executive Director of CCPD, moderated the panel discussion. In his opening remarks, Mr. Muehe stated, "In the 12 years since the ADA was signed into law, our nation has made great progress towards our goal of providing employment opportunity to all people with disabilities." But the employment opportunity gap between workers with and without disabilities still exists, said Mr. Muehe, and "TWWIIA is but the latest in a long string of federal initiatives established to narrow this opportunity gap."



"Beyond a Ticket to Work" panelists (from left): Brian Forsythe, Ben Harris, Barbara Siegel, Jim Sarno, and panel moderator Michael Muehe

Barbara Siegel, staff attorney at Boston's Disability Law Center, led off the panel presentations by giving an overview of TWWIIA. She described how the Ticket to Work program is supposed to work, and the role that the new employment networks will have as alternatives to conventional vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies. Ms. Siegel pointed out that so far, the Ticket to Work program has been grossly underutilized. In Massachusetts, only about 300 people have chosen to assign their Ticket to an employment network, out of nearly 200,000 Tickets issued.

Ms. Siegel went on to describe some common misconceptions about the Ticket to Work program.

For example, some SSI/SSDI recipients think they can simply present the Ticket to an employment agency and get a job automatically. Also, many people with disabilities think they can get a full range of services from whichever employment network they choose, when the

reality is that many, if not most ENs don't offer the full range of services. In conclusion, Ms. Siegel opined that the Ticket to Work program might be getting more attention than it deserves, in comparison with other SSA work incentives.

The next panelist, Brian Forsythe, works as a benefits planner at The Resource Partnership, a non-profit organization in Natick. Mr. Forsythe described some of the new work incentives introduced under TWWIIA. Among these are an "expedited reinstatement" of SSI/SSDI benefits for recipients unable to maintain employment after using their Ticket to get a job. Also, once a SSI/SSDI recipient has assigned his or her Ticket to an employment network, Mr. Forsythe explained,

SSA suspends its process of periodically scrutinizing a recipient's disability. Mr. Forsythe also described some of the benefits planning assistance and outreach services his organization provides, including:

- Helping recipients understand correspondence from SSA
- Describing the SSA appeals process
- Writing Plans to Achieve Self Support (PASS)

Jim Sarno, director of the Cambridge/Somerville office of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, continued the panel presentation by describing MRC's vocational rehab system, and its interactions with TWWIIA. While MRC has qualified as an employment network under the Ticket to Work program, explained Mr. Sarno, new MRC consumers still have a 9-to-12 month wait for services. So, MRC can determine eligibility and vocational need, but can't provide services until the consumer's name comes up on the waiting list. Mr. Sarno stressed that MRC will still serve people with disabilities who don't have a Ticket to Work, or who choose not to sign their Ticket.

Cambridge resident Ben Harris rounded out the panel by describing his experiences as a SSDI beneficiary for the past two and a half years due to a mental disability. Mr. Harris urged the audience to recognize that discrimination and stigma against people with disabilities, especially mental disabilities, still pose big barriers to employment. He advocated for a holistic approach to disability. "TWWIIA's limitations need to be better understood," argued Mr. Harris, "for example, certain SSDI/SSI disability beneficiaries are not eligible for a Ticket, such as people whose mental disabilities are 'expected to improve,' according to SSA." Furthermore, Trial Work Period, Plan to Achieve Self-Support, and other pre-TWWIIA work incentives are still underutilized. Mr. Harris pointed out, that, unfortunately the new employment networks created under TWWIIA are permitted to pick-and-choose which people with disabilities they sign up for services, a practice known as "creaming." This could lead to even more employment discrimination against people with certain disabilities, said Mr. Harris.

Service converts newspaper articles to synthetic speech



NFB-NEWSLINE, a nationwide service developed by the National Federation of the Blind, is an electronic speech newspaper service that is accessed by

touchtone telephone. Local users of NFB-NEWSLINE are enthusiastic. "For blind people, it enables us to be more informed about current events than is possible through television or radio coverage," said Kenneth Bowles, member of the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities. "It's a daily habit that is worth maintaining—it not only gives me access to local papers like the *Boston Globe*, it gives me access to over 50 newspapers nationwide, including the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Los Angeles Times*," continued Mr. Bowles.

The service is free to individuals who cannot read regular print and is available seven days a week, 24 hours a day. The service enables persons who are blind to have ready access to information in newspapers. NFB-NEWSLINE provides today's, yesterday's, and the previous Sunday's issue of each newspaper. Users can easily select a newspaper, a section, and an article of interest from a menu. The menu also allows the listener to change the speed and voice quality and even have it spell out words.

Kobena Bonney, who coordinates NFB-NEWSLINE in Massachusetts, says that "For people not accustomed to a computer-synthesized voice it takes a little getting used to, but then makes the news even more accessible than it is for many newspaper readers."

NFB-NEWSLINE Boston is a partnership between VISION Community Services, a division of the Massachusetts Association for the Blind, and the National Federation of the Blind of Massachusetts. Blind and other print-disabled individuals may qualify for this free service by completing a simple

application, which takes approximately two weeks to process. The subscriber will then receive an NFB-NEWSLINE identification number and security code which allows the individual access to NFB-NEWSLINE at home, at work, and when traveling

throughout the United States and Canada. For more information, call Kobena Bonney at 617-972-9122 or 800-852-3029 (toll-free in Massachusetts only).

Upcoming Events of Interest to the Disability Community

- Oct. 29 **Role Definition for Interpreters in a Church Setting**, presented by Anne Freeman of Vision New England Deaf Ministries (spoken English with ASL interpretation). Workshop is 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Apple Valley Worship Center in Southington, CT. Contact Anne Freeman at 617-325-3809 voice or <AnneFreema@aol.com>.
- Oct. 30 **Br. Rick Curry of the National Theatre Workshop for the Handicapped** will speak at annual Margaret E. Pyne Memorial Lecture at Weston Jesuit School of Theology, 8 p.m. Br. Curry has established acting schools with residential programs and summer workshops for people with disabilities in New York City and in Maine. This lecture, "*Disability as Blessing*" will be in Room 3-A of Sherrill Hall, the library-classroom building on Weston and Episcopal Divinity School campus, 99 Brattle Street in Cambridge. The location is wheelchair accessible.
- Nov. 5 -6 **When Existing Jobs Don't Fit** is a two-day seminar on what to do when "pre-existing" job openings often do not meet the needs of individuals with significant disabilities. Attendees will learn how to work with employers to restructure jobs and maximize creativity in the job development process. Sponsored by Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI). Registration fee \$110. DEADLINE is 3 weeks prior to event. Contact Mandy Gehrig at 617-287-4337 voice, 617-287-4350 TTY, 617-287-4352 fax or at <amanda.gehrig@umb.edu>.
- Nov. 6 **Women Maximizing Abilities Now**, peer support group for women with physical or emotional disabilities and/or chronic conditions meets at The Women's Center, 46 Pleasant St., Cambridge, 2 to 3:30 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of each month. Wheelchair accessible; contact Mary Quinn at 617-354-8807 or <woman@braintrust.org> for more information.
- Nov. 6 **MassRelay & Verizon Regional Community Forum**, 6 to 8 p.m. at Deaf Community Center, 75 Bethany Road in Framingham will provide information about MassRelay and Verizon Center for Customers with Disabilities phone services, with demonstrations of new telephone equipment. The presentations will be conducted in ASL with voice interpretation. For more information call MassRelay Customer Service at 800-720-3479 voice/STS, 800-720-3480 TTY, or email <outreach@massrelay.org>. Presented in association with Verizon Center for Customers with Disabilities and other organizations serving people who are deaf, late-deafened, or hard-of-hearing.
- Nov. 6 **Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) Drop-in group** (information & support) on first Wednesday of each month, 6 to 8 p.m. at Barnes & Noble Bookstore, 5th floor conference room, Kenmore Square in Boston. Call 617-247-6827 for information.
- Nov. 7 **MassRelay Service Regional Community Forum**, 6 to 8 p.m. at New England Home for the Deaf, Thompson House, 154 Water Street in Danvers. (see Nov. 6 listing for details)

Upcoming Events of Interest to the Disability Community (continued)

- Nov. 12-14 **Build Boston**, annual convention and tradeshow for anyone interested in design and the built environment. Exhibits and workshops are at the World Trade Center in Boston, 200 Seaport Blvd. Program includes eleven workshops on access issues, the ADA, and Universal Design. Sponsored by Boston Society of Architects. For more information call 800-544-1898 voice, 508-759-4552 fax or log onto <www.buildboston.com>
- Nov. 12 **Boston Voice Users** is a group for people who use speech recognition or dictation software that meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Building 2, Room 143. There is often a guest speaker. Meeting time is 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Go to their website at <<http://harvee.billerica.ma.us/mailman/listinfo/boston-voice-users>> and click on Boston-voice-users Archives to find out more about meetings and discussions.
- Nov. 13-14 **Community Access Monitor Training in Roxbury at the Reggie Lewis Center.** Help your community become more accessible by taking this 2-day workshop on the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) regulations and ADA Standards for Accessible Design. Get hands-on practice doing site surveys. Registration fee is \$15 for consumers, \$75 for professionals. DEADLINE is two weeks prior to the event if you are requesting accommodations For more information, call Bruce Bruneau at Massachusetts Office on Disability, 617-727-7440 voice/TTY.
- Nov. 14 **CCPD Monthly Meeting** – 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor conference room, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. with opportunity for Public Comment.
- Nov. 14 **Stroke Support Group** at the Cambridge Citywide Senior Center, 806 Massachusetts Ave. in Cambridge, 6-7:30 p.m. For more information contact Melissa Terrien at 800-922-8290, x343.
- Nov. 19 **Disability Policy Consortium (DPC)** monthly meeting, 1 to 3 p.m. at the State House, Room A-1, Boston. For more information call Robert Snierston, Chair, at 617-338-6665 voice, 617-338-6662 TTY or Mary Lou Maloney at 617-216-5181.
- Nov. 19 **Welcoming Children with Disabilities in Religious Education** will be will be topic of panel discussion at Disability Advocates Network meeting sponsored by the Massachusetts and Rhode Island Councils of Churches. Anyone interested in working to make churches more accessible to people with disabilities is invited to attend, 7 to 9 p.m. at Wellesley Hills Congregational Church, 707 Washington St. in Wellesley Hills, MA. For more information contact the Massachusetts Council of Churches at <council@masscouncilofchurches.org> or 617-523-2771.
- Nov. 20 **Housing Discrimination: Know Your Rights**, a workshop for tenants, would-be tenants, 10 to 11 a.m. at Central Square Library, 45 Pearl Street in Cambridge. Presented by the Cambridge Human Rights Commission along with other City departments and agencies. For more information contact Joe Johnson at 617-349-4396 voice, 617-492-0235 TTY, 617-349-4766 fax, or <jjohnson@ci.cambridge.ma.us>.
- Nov. 20 **Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA** meets from 1:00 to 3:30 p.m. at State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, Conference Room 2. Call 617-973-7507 voice or 617-973-7089 TTY for more information or to request interpreters. For problems with The RIDE service, call 617-222-5123 voice, or 617-222-5415 TTY.
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Upcoming Events of Interest to the Disability Community (continued)

- Nov. 20 **Women Maximizing Abilities Now**, (see Nov. 6 listing for details.)
- Nov. 26 **LD/ADHD Consumer Group** for persons with Learning Disabilities/ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is sponsored by Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) and meets at MRC Somerville Area Office at 5 Middlesex Ave., Suite 302 in Somerville. Business meeting 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Support Group 1 to 2 p.m.. For more information contact Jim Fratolillo at 617-204-3854 voice, 617-204-3847 fax or Angelica Sawyer at 617-661-3117 (voice).
- Dec. 4 **Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) Drop-in group** (See earlier listing for Nov. 6)
- Dec. 11 **Forum on Accessibility at Harvest Co-Op Markets** – this is an opportunity to meet with key staff of the Harvest Co-Op Markets to discuss ways to make their cooperative markets in Cambridge and Jamaica Plain more welcoming for customers with disabilities. Forums will take place from 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. and 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. at the Wainwright Bank community room, 647 Massachusetts Avenue in Central Square, Cambridge. For more information, contact Chris Durkin, Member Services Coordinator, Harvest Co-Op Markets, 617-661-1580 x132 voice or <cdurkin@harvestcoop.com>.
- Dec. 11-14 **Our Quest: Opportunity, Equality, Justice - 2002 National TASH Conference** at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston. TASH (acronym from its earlier name of The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps) is an international association of people with disabilities, their family members, other advocates, and professionals that work together for social and systems reform. Sessions include facilitated communication, inclusive education, student voices in transition planning, community building, and vocational opportunities. Special pre-conference programs include a 2-day symposium (Dec. 10-11) on *Understanding and Preventing Violence Against People with Disabilities* by Tim Lynch, Dick Sobsey, Lorraine Wilgosh and Kate Scorgie; one-day symposium (Dec. 11) on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Advocates*. Registration fees vary from \$44 to \$374 depending on membership and event participation. For more information check the TASH website at <www.tash.org> or contact TASH at 1-800-482-8274 voice, 410-828-6706 fax.
- Dec. 12 **CCPD Monthly Meeting and HOLIDAY Gathering** – 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor conference room, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. with opportunity for Public Comment. Bring a holiday delicacy to share (optional).
- Dec. 17 **Employment Law and People with Disabilities: The ADA and Beyond** will cover aspects of employment law that affect people with disabilities such as the Family & Medical Leave Act, sexual harassment law, employee performance, and terminations issues. It will also examine the responsibilities of employees in a business and review recent ADA rulings. This 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. workshop will be held in the Hogan Campus Center at Holy Cross College in Worcester. Fee: \$75. Registration DEADLINE is 3 weeks prior to the event. Contact Mandy Gehrig at 617-287-4337 voice, 617-287-4350 TTY, 617-287-4352 fax or email at <amanda.gehrig@umb.edu>.
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Access Notice

The City of Cambridge does not discriminate on the basis of disability. This newsletter is available in electronic mail, large print and other alternative formats upon request. To add your name to our mailing list, to inquire about alternative formats, or for information about other auxiliary aids and services or reasonable modifications in policies and procedures, contact CCPD.

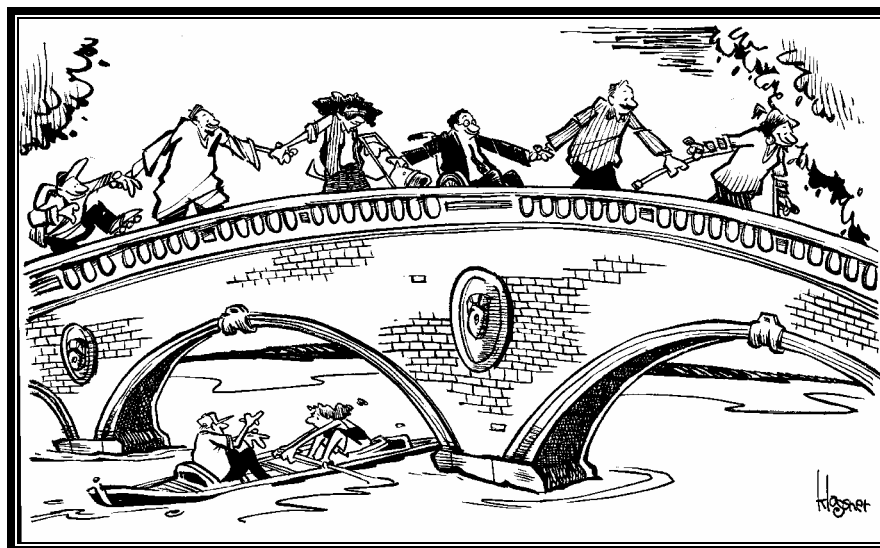
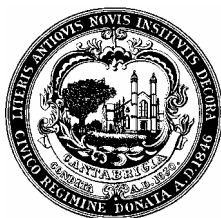
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Access**Letter** is produced by the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities,
part of the Department of Human Service Programs

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